

The Radical Hermeneutics of Matthew 5:9: A Transhistorical Analysis of Non-Violent Praxis and Social Transformation

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The seventh beatitude, traditionally translated as blessed are the peacemakers, represents one of the most intellectually contested and practically demanding instructions in the history of ethical philosophy. While frequently co-opted by state actors to justify diplomatic stabilization or military intervention, a distinct lineage of radical practitioners has interpreted this verse not as a call to passivity, but as a mandate for systemic disruption. This paper examines the lives and legacies of individuals who transitioned the beatitude from a liturgical sentiment into a rigorous political and social methodology. By analyzing the work of figures such as Tolstoy, Day, Gbowee, and Bonhoeffer, we explore how the concept of the peacemaker evolved into a form of holy outlawry—a commitment to non-violence that often necessitated direct confrontation with the state. The following sections investigate the linguistic roots of the term *eirenopoios*, the divergence between institutional and radical interpretations, and the specific historical moments where this ethos altered the course of human rights and international law. Ultimately, this analysis seeks to define the architecture of radical peace as a proactive, often sacrificial, engagement with injustice that prioritizes human dignity over institutional order.

Keywords: Matthew 5:9, Peacemaking, Non-violence, Radical Theology, Pacifism, Social Justice, Civil Disobedience, Political Ethics, Conflict Resolution, Hermeneutics.

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1. The Linguistic and Theological Origins of Eirenopoios

The academic investigation into the seventh beatitude must begin with a rigorous deconstruction of the Greek term eirenopoios. This compound noun, appearing only once in the New Testament, is formed from eirene, meaning peace, and poieo, a verb signifying to make, to do, or to construct. In the context of first-century Koine Greek, this linguistic choice is intentional and provocative. It moves the discourse away from a passive state of being—what might be termed eirenophilos or a lover of peace—and into the realm of active, constructive labor. To be an eirenopoios is to be a craftsman of harmony, suggesting that peace is not a natural byproduct of social silence but a manufactured reality requiring specific tools, effort, and intervention.

1.1 Etymological Foundations: Eirene and Poieo

The use of the verb poieo implies a creative process akin to poetry or carpentry. When applied to peace, it suggests that the environment of the Kingdom of Heaven is one where conflict is not merely avoided but actively transformed. In the classical Greek tradition, eirene was often defined negatively as the interval between wars. However, the New Testament usage, heavily influenced by the Hebrew conceptual framework, shifts this toward a positive, holistic state of communal flourishing. By joining this to the suffix of agency, the beatitude identifies a specific class of people whose primary vocation is the reconciliation of fractured relationships and the dismantling of the mechanisms of strife. This linguistic root provides the foundation for what modern scholars call active non-violence, distinguishing it from the sedentary connotations of 20th-century pacifism.

1.2 From Shalom to Eirene: The Septuagintal Bridge

To understand the depth of Matthew 5:9, one must look through the lens of the Hebrew shalom. The translators of the Septuagint chose eirene to represent shalom, but the Greek word often struggled to contain the vastness of the Hebrew concept. Shalom denotes more than the absence of hostility; it encompasses health, prosperity, security, and a right relationship between the individual, the community, and the Divine. When Jesus speaks of peacemaking, his audience would have heard an echo of the prophetic tradition which linked peace inextricably to justice. Therefore, the theological origin of the beatitude is not found in a quietist withdrawal from the world, but in the prophetic drive to restore the world to its intended state of wholeness. The peacemaker is thus a restorer of shalom, one who works to ensure that all members of the community have what they need to thrive.

1.3 The Pax Romana and the Subversive Nature of Christ's Peace

The historical context of the Sermon on the Mount provides a sharp contrast to the imperial ideology of the time. During the first century, the Mediterranean world was under the umbrella

of the Pax Romana, or Roman Peace. This peace was maintained through the use of the gladius and the cross, achieved via the total subjugation of enemies and the systematic execution of dissenters. Caesar Augustus was frequently hailed as a peacemaker who had brought order to the chaotic edges of the empire. By declaring the peacemakers blessed, Jesus was offering a direct counter-narrative to the Roman definition of peace. In the Kingdom of Heaven, peace is not established through the violent suppression of the weak by the strong, but through the sacrificial service of the humble. This makes the beatitude a subversive political statement, reclaiming the title of peacemaker from the emperor and bestowing it upon those who refuse to use the emperor's methods.

1.4 The Filial Promise: Theological Implications of Divine Paternity

The reward offered to the peacemakers—that they shall be called children of God—is perhaps the most significant theological component of the verse. In ancient Mediterranean culture, being called a child of someone implied a shared character and a visible likeness in behavior. To be a child of God is to act as God acts. Within the narrative arc of the New Testament, God is primarily characterized as a God of reconciliation who initiates peace with humanity. Consequently, those who engage in the work of peacemaking are displaying their divine parentage. This is not a legalistic status but a relational identification. The peacemaker becomes an image-bearer in the most literal sense, reflecting the reconciling nature of the Creator into a broken world. This connection between peacemaking and divine sonship elevates the task from a social utility to a spiritual necessity, positioning the practitioner as a participant in the ongoing work of the Divine.

1.5 The Creative Tension of Active Reconciliation

Finally, the theological origins of this beatitude establish a creative tension that the radical practitioners would later exploit. If peace is something that must be made, it implies that the current state of the world is one of un-making or brokenness. The peacemaker must, therefore, enter into the center of the conflict. This prevents the beatitude from being used as a tool for maintaining an unjust status quo. If a situation is built on injustice, it is not truly at peace; it is merely quiet. The eirenopoios is tasked with disturbing that false quiet to build a true, lasting shalom. This understanding of the verse serves as the departure point for all radical interpretations, moving the focus from the avoidance of trouble to the active, non-violent engagement with the forces that prevent true peace from taking root.

2. The Great Divergence: Institutional vs. Radical Interpretations

The historical trajectory of Matthew 5:9 is marked by a profound schism in how the term peacemaker is defined and applied. This divergence represents a fundamental disagreement

over the nature of power, the legitimacy of state violence, and the scope of individual moral responsibility. On one side stands the institutional interpretation, which has historically aligned itself with the preservation of social order and the mechanisms of the state. On the other stands the radical interpretation, which views peacemaking as a disruptive, transformative force that often exists in direct opposition to state-sanctioned stability. This section explores the origins of this split and the intellectual frameworks that sustain both sides.

2.1 The Constantinian Shift and the Sanctification of State Force

The primary catalyst for the institutionalization of the seventh beatitude was the conversion of the Roman Empire under Constantine in the fourth century. Prior to this era, the early Christian community largely viewed peacemaking as an invitation to non-resistance and a rejection of military service. However, as the church transitioned from a persecuted minority to the official religion of the empire, the definition of *eirenopoios* underwent a radical transformation. The peacemaker was no longer the martyr or the dissenter, but the Christian magistrate or soldier whose duty was to maintain the *Pax Romana*. This shift necessitated a theological reconciliation between the command to make peace and the practical requirements of imperial governance. Consequently, peacemaking became synonymous with the maintenance of a godly order, providing a moral justification for the use of the sword in the name of divine stability.

2.2 Just War Theory as Institutional Peacemaking

The intellectual formalization of institutional peacemaking found its most enduring expression in the development of Just War Theory, primarily through the work of Augustine of Hippo and later Thomas Aquinas. These thinkers argued that true peace is found in the *tranquilitas ordinis*, or the tranquility of order. In this framework, the peacemaker is one who uses force—under strict moral guidelines—to restrain evil and restore a just equilibrium. By this logic, a soldier engaged in a just war is, paradoxically, a peacemaker. This interpretation has remained the dominant paradigm for Western religious and political institutions for over a millennium. It allows for a world in which one can claim the blessing of Matthew 5:9 while simultaneously participating in the organized violence of the state, provided that violence is directed toward the preservation of a perceived greater good.

2.3 The Radical Critique: Peace as an Absolute Prohibition

In direct opposition to the institutional model, the radical tradition has consistently maintained that the call to be a peacemaker is an absolute prohibition against the use of violence. This lineage, often found among the desert fathers, the medieval mendicant orders, and the radical reformers of the sixteenth century, argues that the institutional interpretation is a betrayal of the Sermon on the Mount. For these practitioners, the methods used to achieve peace are inseparable from the peace itself. If the means are violent, the resulting state is not peace but

merely a temporary cessation of hostilities maintained by fear. The radical interpretation posits that a peacemaker must be willing to suffer violence rather than inflict it, following the cruciform model of Christ. This perspective rejects the concept of a just war, viewing it as a linguistic sleight of hand designed to baptize state interests in the language of the kingdom.

2.4 The Divergence of Order and Shalom

A critical point of tension between these two schools of thought is the distinction between social order and biblical shalom. Institutional interpretations often prioritize order—the absence of visible conflict and the functioning of hierarchy—as the primary evidence of peace. From this viewpoint, anyone who disrupts the status quo is a threat to peace. Radical practitioners, however, argue that order is frequently a mask for systemic injustice. If a society is quiet because the marginalized are suppressed, that society is not at peace. Therefore, the radical peacemaker may choose to disrupt the order to reveal the hidden violence beneath it. This creates a scenario where the radical is seen by the institution as a troublemaker or a subversive, even though the radical claims to be fulfilling the command to make peace by seeking a deeper, more honest reconciliation.

2.5 Semantic Capture and the Modern Secular State

In the modern era, this divergence has moved beyond the walls of the church and into the lexicon of secular statecraft. The term peacemaker has undergone what sociologists call semantic capture, where the language of an ethical ideal is co-opted to describe its opposite. This is seen in the naming of nuclear missiles as Peacemakers or the description of military occupations as peacekeeping missions. The institutional interpretation has provided a template for the modern state to use the aura of the seventh beatitude to validate geopolitical strategy. Meanwhile, the radical tradition continues to challenge this usage, asserting that true peacemaking cannot be outsourced to the military-industrial complex. This ongoing struggle for the soul of the word reflects a deeper conflict over whether peace is something imposed from the top down through strength or cultivated from the bottom up through vulnerability.

3. The Progenitors of Radical Pacifism: Tolstoy and the Anarchist Critique

The late nineteenth century witnessed a profound reinvention of the peacemaker through the work of Leo Tolstoy. While previously associated with sectarian movements like the Quakers or Mennonites, Tolstoy stripped the seventh beatitude of its denominational trappings and repositioned it as a universal, rational, and revolutionary principle. For Tolstoy, Matthew 5:9 was not a pious wish but the cornerstone of a comprehensive social and political philosophy that demanded the total dismantling of the modern state. His transition from the world's most celebrated novelist to a radical Christian anarchist was fueled by a literalist reading of the

Sermon on the Mount, which he believed had been intentionally obscured by church and state to protect their own violent interests.

3.1 The Crisis of Meaning and the Discovery of Non-Resistance

Tolstoy's journey toward radical peacemaking began with a profound existential crisis following the completion of his major literary works. Despite his fame and wealth, he found the structural violence of Russian society and the institutional church's complicity in war to be morally unbearable. He embarked on a rigorous study of the Gospels, concluding that the core of Jesus' teaching was found in the injunction to resist not evil with violence. In his view, the peacemaker is not merely someone who mediates between parties, but someone who breaks the cycle of violence by refusing to strike back. This realization turned the beatitude into an active, physical strategy of non-cooperation. He argued that if everyone took the command to be a peacemaker seriously, the machinery of war and the legal systems of oppression would collapse for lack of participants.

3.2 The Anarchist Critique of the State as a Violent Entity

The most radical aspect of Tolstoy's interpretation was his identification of the state as the primary obstacle to peace. He argued that the state is inherently an institution of violence, maintained by the threat of the soldier, the policeman, and the executioner. Therefore, a peacemaker cannot be a patriot in the traditional sense, nor can they hold office or serve in the military. To be a child of God, in the Tolstoyan sense, is to renounce all earthly allegiances that require the use of force. This created a new archetype of the peacemaker: the conscientious objector. Tolstoy's critique suggested that the institutional peacemakers of Section 2—the diplomats and generals—were actually perpetrators of violence because they relied on the threat of death to maintain a false order. True peacemaking, he insisted, required the abolition of the state and its replacement with a society based on voluntary cooperation and brotherly love.

3.3 The Kingdom of God is Within You: Peace as an Internal Revolution

In his seminal work, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy argued that the transformation of society must begin with the individual's internal adherence to the beatitudes. He believed that once a person recognizes their divine nature as a peacemaker, they can no longer participate in the violence of the world. This internal revolution renders the external structures of control obsolete. Tolstoy's peace was not a geopolitical treaty but a state of being that refused to recognize the legitimacy of borders or the authority of one human over another. By centering the beatitude within the individual conscience, he empowered the common person to challenge the most powerful empires of the day simply by saying no to the call to arms.

3.4 The Rejection of Church Authority and Liturgical Peace

Tolstoy was equally scathing in his critique of the institutional church, which he accused of perverting the beatitudes into harmless liturgical chants. He pointed out the hypocrisy of priests blessing cannons and praying for military victory while claiming to follow the Prince of Peace. For Tolstoy, the church's role as an arm of the state made it a primary architect of war. He argued that the church had turned the peacemaker into a passive observer who waits for a future kingdom, whereas Jesus intended the peacemaker to be an active builder of that kingdom in the present. This rejection of ecclesiastical authority was a necessary step in his radical hermeneutic, as it allowed him to reclaim the Sermon on the Mount as a manual for direct social action rather than a set of abstract dogmas.

3.5 The Global Legacy: From Yasnaya Polyana to the World

The influence of Tolstoy's radical peacemaking cannot be overstated, as it provided the intellectual scaffolding for the great non-violent movements of the twentieth century. His correspondence with a young Mohandas Gandhi established a direct link between the seventh beatitude and the development of Satyagraha, or soul force. Tolstoy proved that the radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9 was not a marginal religious eccentricity but a potent political tool capable of toppling empires. He redefined the peacemaker as a figure of immense moral power whose strength lies in their vulnerability and their absolute refusal to harm others. By shifting the focus from diplomatic negotiation to radical non-resistance, Tolstoy set the stage for a century of dissenters who would use the beatitude to challenge the very foundations of modern civilization.

4. Early 20th Century Pioneers: Addams, Jägerstätter, and the Cost of Dissent

The early twentieth century served as a brutal laboratory for the radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9. As the world descended into the industrial-scale slaughter of two World Wars, the definition of a peacemaker shifted from a philosophical ideal to a life-or-death choice. This era highlighted the immense social and physical cost of dissent, demonstrating that the promise of being called children of God often came at the price of being branded as traitors by the state. Through the contrasting lives of Jane Addams in the United States and Franz Jägerstätter in Nazi-occupied Austria, the radical peacemaker emerged as a figure who resisted the intoxicating pull of nationalism in favor of a higher, more universal ethical commitment.

4.1 Jane Addams and the Secularization of Social Peace

Jane Addams transformed the concept of peacemaking from a personal virtue into a rigorous social science. While she operated largely within a secular framework, her work at Hull House in

Chicago was a lived embodiment of the beatitude's demand to build shalom. For Addams, peace was not simply the absence of war between nations, but the presence of social health within neighborhoods. She argued that the peacemaker must be a neighbor first, addressing the poverty, sanitation, and labor conditions that create the friction leading to violence. Her radicalism lay in her insistence that peace was an active, daily labor of integration and empathy. By providing a platform for immigrants of warring European nationalities to live and work together in Chicago, she proved that peacemaking was possible through shared creative effort rather than coercive force.

4.2 The Breadwinner as Peacemaker: Hull House and Urban Shalom

At the heart of Addams's philosophy was the belief that the impulse to nurture life was more fundamental than the impulse to destroy it. She viewed the peacemaker as a maternal or civic figure who prioritizes the protection of the vulnerable over the expansion of the state. This led her to redefine the seventh beatitude as a call to industrial and social reform. In her view, the person who advocated for child labor laws or safe working conditions was a peacemaker because they were removing the structural injustices that act as the seeds of future conflict. This expansive definition moved the beatitude out of the chapel and into the tenement, suggesting that the work of the child of God was to be found in the mundane struggles for human dignity.

4.3 The Great War and the Ostracization of the Pacifist

The true test of Addams's commitment came with the outbreak of World War I. While the majority of the American public and the religious establishment were swept up in a fervor of patriotism, Addams remained an unshakable pacifist. She co-founded the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, arguing that the war was a catastrophic failure of human imagination. The cost of this dissent was severe; the woman once hailed as the Saint of Hull House was suddenly denounced as the most dangerous woman in America and a threat to national security. This period of her life illustrates the radical isolation that often accompanies the seventh beatitude. To be a peacemaker in a time of war is to be viewed as an obstructionist to the collective will, revealing that the world's definition of peace is often contingent on total conformity.

4.4 Franz Jägerstätter: The Solitary Witness against Totalitarianism

While Addams faced social ostracization, Franz Jägerstätter faced the guillotine. An Austrian farmer and devout Catholic, Jägerstätter became a radical practitioner of the beatitudes when he refused to take the oath of loyalty to Hitler or serve in the Wehrmacht. His dissent was not born of political theory but of a simple, devastatingly literal reading of the Gospels. He believed that a Christian could not be a peacemaker while wearing the uniform of a regime dedicated to

racial extermination and unprovoked conquest. Despite intense pressure from his family, his community, and even his own church leaders—who urged him to fulfill his duty to the state for the sake of his wife and children—Jägerstätter remained resolute. His life stands as the ultimate example of the peacemaker as a conscientious objector whose primary allegiance is to a kingdom not of this world.

4.5 The Ultimate Price: Conscience versus the Command of the State

The execution of Jägerstätter in 1943 by the Nazi state serves as a stark reminder of the cost of radical discipleship. In his prison writings, he noted that the world praises the peacemaker in the abstract but destroys them in the particular when their peace interferes with the ambitions of power. His refusal to fight was a profound act of peacemaking because it withdrew his individual consent from the machinery of death. Unlike the institutional interpretation of the beatitude, which might have allowed him to serve as a medic or a non-combatant to maintain a clean conscience, Jägerstätter's radicalism led him to reject the entire system of state-sanctioned violence. His story bridges the gap between the philosophical pacifism of the nineteenth century and the active, sacrificial resistance that would characterize the civil rights and anti-war movements of the later twentieth century.

4.6 The Legacy of Early Century Dissent

The combined legacies of Addams and Jägerstätter redefined the peacemaker as a figure of moral loneliness. They demonstrated that the seventh beatitude requires a willingness to stand against the tide of one's own culture. Whether through the social reform of the American city or the solitary cell of an Austrian prison, these practitioners proved that making peace is often a form of non-violent warfare against the prevailing spirits of the age. They moved the discourse of Matthew 5:9 beyond the realm of polite diplomacy, anchoring it instead in the uncompromising demands of the human conscience. Their lives set the stage for the mid-century thinkers who would further refine the theology of the heart and the communal nature of radical peace.

5. The Mid-Century Shift: Merton and the Disarmament of the Heart

As the world entered the atomic age, the radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9 underwent a psychological and contemplative deepening. While previous practitioners had focused on social reform or conscientious objection to conventional warfare, the mid-twentieth century presented a new, existential threat: the possibility of total planetary annihilation. In this context, Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk living in the Abbey of Gethsemani, emerged as a pivotal figure. Merton argued that external peacemaking was a dangerous illusion if it was not preceded by a radical interior transformation. For Merton, the seventh beatitude was not

merely a call to stop wars, but a call to dismantle the very foundations of the human ego that make war seem inevitable.

5.1 The Monastery as a Laboratory for Global Peace

Merton's contribution to the radical hermeneutic of the peacemaker is characterized by the paradox of his life: he sought to influence the world by withdrawing from it. From his monastic cell, he engaged in a vast correspondence with activists, poets, and world leaders, arguing that the monk's silence was a necessary prerequisite for the peacemaker's speech. He believed that the noise of modern propaganda and the rush of political activism often obscured the true nature of peace. By practicing contemplation, the monk uncovers the illusions of the self and the false divisions that lead to conflict. Merton posited that the *eirenopoios* must first be a person of prayer who has looked into the depths of their own capacity for violence and found the ground of mercy. This moved the beatitude from the realm of tactical strategy to the realm of ontological reality.

5.2 The Root of War is Fear: A Psychological Hermeneutic

In his influential writings during the 1960s, Merton identified fear as the primary obstacle to the fulfillment of the seventh beatitude. He argued that modern humans are driven by a deep-seated anxiety about their own security and identity, which they project onto an enemy. In this framework, the peacemaker's first task is the disarmament of the heart. This involves a psychological process of recognizing that the enemy is not a monster, but another human being caught in the same cycle of fear. Merton suggested that the institutional peace mentioned in Section 2—the peace of nuclear deterrence and cold war balance—was actually a state of organized despair. True peacemaking requires the courage to be vulnerable and to trust in the humanity of the other, even when that trust is not reciprocated.

5.3 Challenging the Christian Justification of the Atomic Bomb

Merton was particularly scathing in his critique of religious leaders who used traditional moral categories to justify the possession and potential use of nuclear weapons. He argued that the advent of the atomic age rendered traditional Just War Theory obsolete. In a world where a single act of aggression could lead to the destruction of all life, the call to be a peacemaker became an absolute mandate for total non-violence. Merton faced significant opposition from his own monastic superiors and the Catholic hierarchy, who often attempted to silence his political writings. His insistence that a Christian could not be a child of God while supporting a policy of mass murder was a radical reclamation of the beatitude against the compromise of the institutional church. He saw the nuclear-armed Christian as a theological contradiction that the radical peacemaker was required to expose.

5.4 The Guilt of the Innocent: Responsibility in the Atomic Age

A key element of Merton's radicalism was his concept of the guilt of the innocent. He argued that those who consider themselves peaceful because they do not personally pull a trigger are often complicit in the structural violence of their society. The peacemaker, therefore, cannot be a bystander. To be a child of God is to take responsibility for the violence of one's nation, one's economic system, and one's culture. This expanded the scope of the seventh beatitude to include a form of social repentance. Merton's peacemaker is someone who actively seeks out the truth behind the myths of national glory and military necessity. This intellectual and spiritual honesty was, for Merton, the most radical act of peacemaking possible in a world dominated by official lies.

5.5 Contemplation as a Subversive Act

Finally, Merton redefined the relationship between the interior life and social action. He argued that without a contemplative foundation, the activist risks becoming a mirror image of the violent force they are trying to oppose. The radical peacemaker must operate from a center of stillness that the world cannot touch. This stillness is not a form of passivity, but a form of resistance; it is the refusal to be swept up in the collective madness of the war machine. By centering the peacemaker in the experience of God's unconditional love, Merton provided a spiritual endurance that was essential for the long struggle of the civil rights and anti-war movements. His work ensured that the radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9 would always include a dimension of depth, reminding the practitioner that the peace they make in the world must first be found within.

6. The Catholic Worker and Koinonia: Communalism as Peace-Building

The mid-twentieth century saw a shift from the individual conscientious objector to the formation of intentional communities that viewed the seventh beatitude as an economic and social mandate. For these practitioners, the work of an eirenopoios could not be performed in isolation or within the structures of a capitalist society geared toward permanent war preparation. Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker Movement and Clarence Jordan's Koinonia Farm reimagined peacemaking as a collective lifestyle, arguing that to truly make peace, one must create an alternative society where the incentives for violence are removed. This communalist approach suggested that the children of God are recognized not by their diplomatic credentials, but by their willingness to share bread, land, and labor with the marginalized.

6.1 Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker: Poverty as a Pacifist Tool

Dorothy Day's interpretation of Matthew 5:9 was rooted in the radical conviction that property is the primary cause of war. Drawing on the teachings of the early church fathers, Day argued that when individuals accumulate more than they need, they inevitably require a police force and a military to defend their surplus from those who have nothing. Therefore, the first step in becoming a peacemaker is the embrace of voluntary poverty. By living in Houses of Hospitality alongside the urban poor, Day and her followers attempted to strip away the material defenses that necessitate violence. For Day, the peacemaker is someone who has nothing left to defend, thereby rendering the logic of the sword irrelevant. This was a direct challenge to the institutional view that peace is protected by strength; Day countered that true peace is protected by the absence of greed.

6.2 The Works of Mercy versus The Works of War

A central tenet of the Catholic Worker movement was the sharp distinction between the works of mercy and the works of war. Day frequently quoted the list of corporal works of mercy—feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless—as the only legitimate activities for a child of God. She argued that these actions were the literal construction of peace. Conversely, she viewed the activities of the state—taxation for armaments, conscription, and the development of nuclear weapons—as the works of war, which are the diametrical opposite of the seventh beatitude. This created a binary moral universe where every act of hospitality was an act of peacemaking and every participation in the military-industrial complex was a rejection of Christ. Her radicalism lay in the refusal to compromise this vision, even during World War II, when she insisted that the works of mercy must continue to be extended to all, regardless of nationality or political affiliation.

6.3 Clarence Jordan and Koinonia Farm: Racial Reconciliation as Peacemaking

While Day addressed the violence of class and capital, Clarence Jordan addressed the violence of racial caste in the American South. In 1942, Jordan founded Koinonia Farm in Georgia as a demonstration plot for the Kingdom of God. This interracial community was a radical experiment in peacemaking within a society defined by the violent enforcement of Jim Crow laws. Jordan believed that the *eirenopoios* must bridge the most volatile divides of their time. By having Black and White families live, eat, and work together on equal terms, Koinonia was an active disruption of the false peace of segregation. Jordan argued that the church's silence on racial injustice was a form of false witness, and that true peacemaking required the physical integration of the human family, even in the face of terrorist violence from groups like the Ku Klux Klan.

6.4 The Cotton Patch Hermeneutic: Living the Gospel in the Jim Crow South

Jordan's theological contribution, often referred to as the Cotton Patch Gospel, translated the Greek of the New Testament into the vernacular of the rural South. In his rendering of the Beatitudes, the peacemakers were those who worked for the "God Movement" to bring people together. He viewed the seventh beatitude as a call to radical partnership. When the farm was firebombed and boycotted by the local community, Jordan refused to call for police protection or to retaliate. He insisted that the farm's survival depended not on force, but on the power of its example. This approach turned the farm itself into a living text of the seventh beatitude. For Jordan, to be called a child of God was to be an agitator for a love that recognized no borders of race or class, making the peacemaker a figure of profound social friction rather than a seeker of quietude.

6.5 Communalism as a Subversive Economic Peace

The shared thread between Day and Jordan was the belief that peacemaking is an economic act. Both practitioners recognized that as long as people are divided by competition for resources, violence is inevitable. By practicing a form of communalism—where resources were shared and the needs of the weakest were prioritized—they created micro-societies that were functionally at peace. This was not a passive withdrawal from the world, but a proactive attempt to model a different way of being human. They proved that the seventh beatitude requires the creation of new institutions that do not rely on the coercive power of the state. In this radical communalist framework, the peacemaker is a builder of a new world within the shell of the old, demonstrating that shalom is possible when the community prioritizes the common good over individual security.

7. The Berrigan Era: Holy Outlawry and Property Destruction

The late 1960s and 1970s marked a dramatic escalation in the radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9, as the anti-war movement in the United States moved from legal protest to what became known as holy outlawry. Central to this shift were Daniel and Philip Berrigan, two Catholic priests who argued that the seventh beatitude demanded more than just a refusal to participate in war; it required the active, physical disruption of the machinery of death. For the Berrigans, the peacemaker was not a mediator but a saboteur of injustice. This era introduced the controversial concept that the destruction of property—specifically property used to facilitate war—was a legitimate and non-violent act of peacemaking.

7.1 The Catonsville Nine: Peacemaking as Provocation

In May 1968, the Berrigans and seven other activists entered a draft board office in Catonsville, Maryland, removed hundreds of individual draft files, and burned them in the parking lot using homemade napalm. This act was designed to be a prophetic sign. By using napalm—the very substance being used to incinerate villages in Vietnam—to destroy the papers that authorized the conscription of young men, they sought to make the invisible violence of the state visible. In their view, the act of burning files was a profound exercise in peacemaking because it physically prevented, if only for a moment, the processing of human beings into soldiers. This event signaled the birth of a new radical hermeneutic: that the child of God must sometimes break the law of the state to uphold the higher law of life.

7.2 The Theology of Holy Outlawry

The Berrigans developed a theology that viewed the state as a "fallen power" that had co-opted the language of peace to justify slaughter. Daniel Berrigan, a poet and Jesuit priest, argued that when the law becomes an instrument of war, the peacemaker has a divine obligation to become an outlaw. He famously asked why it was considered a crime to burn paper instead of children. This perspective reframed the seventh beatitude as a call to divine obedience that transcends national allegiance. The "holy outlaw" does not act out of hatred for the state, but out of a desperate love for humanity, accepting the legal consequences of their actions—including long prison sentences—as a form of secondary peacemaking. The trial and subsequent imprisonment became a "liturgy of dissent," where the courtroom was used as a pulpit to preach the non-violence of the Gospel.

7.3 Property Destruction vs. Violence against Persons

A critical and often misunderstood component of the Berrigan era was the strict distinction between violence against people and "violence" against property. The radical practitioners of this period argued that property used for killing has no moral right to exist. To hammer a nose cone of a nuclear missile or to pour blood on military files was seen not as an act of violence, but as a symbolic and literal "disarming" of the world. They maintained that true non-violence requires the protection of all sentient life, but it does not require the protection of the "idols of war." By attacking the physical infrastructure of the military, they believed they were fulfilling the prophetic mandate to beat swords into plowshares. This distinction allowed them to remain within the tradition of non-resistance while engaging in high-stakes, confrontational tactics that shocked both the public and the institutional church.

7.4 The Peacemaker as a Fugitive

When Daniel Berrigan went underground to avoid a prison sentence following the Catonsville trial, he turned his status as a fugitive into a theatrical and theological statement. For several

months, he eluded the FBI, appearing suddenly at churches and universities to deliver sermons on the seventh beatitude before vanishing again. This "peacemaker as fugitive" archetype emphasized that the Kingdom of Heaven is in a state of permanent tension with the kingdoms of this world. Berrigan argued that if the state is hunting you because you refuse to kill, you are likely in the exact position Jesus described in the Beatitudes. This period highlighted the inherent "troublemaking" nature of radical peace, suggesting that the child of God should expect to be a stranger and a wanderer in a society committed to militarism.

7.5 The Plowshares Movement: Beating Swords into Plowshares

The legacy of the Berrigans culminated in the formation of the Plowshares movement in 1980. This decentralized movement involved small groups of activists breaking into nuclear weapon facilities and high-tech military sites to perform acts of symbolic disarmament. Unlike earlier protests, these actions often resulted in decades of imprisonment. These practitioners viewed their time in prison as part of their vocation as peacemakers, arguing that the presence of a "peacemaker" in a prison cell is a judgment on a society that builds its security on the threat of global suicide. The Plowshares movement took the radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9 to its furthest logical conclusion: that the peacemaker must be willing to sacrifice their entire life and freedom to stand in the way of the "tools of the apocalypse."

7.6 The Moral Logic of the Disruptive Peace

The Berrigan era challenged the idea that peace is synonymous with quietude. They asserted that in a world of systemic violence, "peace" is often just a code word for the smooth operation of the war machine. Therefore, the peacemaker must be a monkey wrench in the gears. This radicalism forced a re-evaluation of the role of the Christian in a democracy. Is the peacemaker a citizen who works within the system, or a prophet who stands outside it? By choosing the latter, the Berrigans and their followers ensured that the seventh beatitude would forever be associated with the "costly discipleship" of those who believe that the only way to make peace is to physically stop the making of war.

8. Global Manifestations: The Liberation Theology of the Goss-Mayrs

While much of the radical interpretation of the seventh beatitude in the twentieth century emerged from North American and European contexts, its most significant geopolitical impact occurred through the global travels and teachings of Jean Goss and Hildegard Goss-Mayr. This husband-and-wife team acted as the primary conduits for the theology of active non-violence, transporting the radical hermeneutics of the Sermon on the Mount into the volatile landscapes of military dictatorships and revolutionary movements in the Global South. For the Goss-Mayrs, the peacemaker was a peripatetic teacher who provided oppressed populations with the moral

and tactical tools to overthrow tyranny without replicating the violence of their oppressors. Their work represents a pivotal moment where the seventh beatitude was integrated into the broader framework of liberation theology.

8.1 The Synthesis of Personal Witness and Global Strategy

The partnership of Jean Goss, a French soldier who had a transformative experience in a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp, and Hildegard Goss-Mayr, an Austrian philosopher, created a unique synergy of lived experience and intellectual rigor. They argued that the command to be a peacemaker was not a European luxury but a universal necessity for human survival. Their mission was to strip non-violence of its reputation as a passive or weak response and rebrand it as the most potent form of political power. By traveling to conflict zones in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa, they functioned as catalysts for a global network of radical practitioners who viewed the seventh beatitude as the key to national liberation.

8.2 Non-Violence as the Third Way in Latin America

In the 1960s and 1970s, Latin America was caught between the structural violence of US-backed military juntas and the revolutionary violence of Marxist guerrilla movements. The Goss-Mayrs intervened by proposing a third way based on the radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9. They argued that if the goal of a revolution is a peaceful society, the means of that revolution must be peaceful. This was not a call to submit to the dictators, but a call to a more effective form of resistance. They conducted hundreds of seminars for clergy, labor leaders, and students, teaching them how to organize strikes, boycotts, and public demonstrations that remained strictly non-violent. This approach challenged the traditional liberation theologians who occasionally flirted with the idea of a just revolution, insisting instead that the peacemaker must maintain a purity of means to achieve a lasting shalom.

8.3 The Conversion of the Hierarchy: Romero and Esquivel

The influence of the Goss-Mayrs is most visible in the radicalization of key figures in the Latin American struggle for human rights. They were instrumental in the formation of the Service for Peace and Justice (SERPAJ), led by Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, who would later win the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent opposition to the Argentine junta. Furthermore, their interactions with Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador helped shift his perspective toward a more vocal and active defense of the poor. By framing the struggle for justice as the essential work of the peacemaker, the Goss-Mayrs helped create a religious environment where the church could no longer remain neutral. They proved that the child of God is often found in the crosshairs of both the state and the insurgents, acting as a buffer that protects the humanity of all parties.

8.4 The Philippines and the 1986 People Power Revolution

Perhaps the most dramatic application of the Goss-Mayrs' radical hermeneutic occurred in the Philippines. Following the assassination of Benigno Aquino Jr., the couple spent months in the country training thousands of activists, nuns, and priests in the principles of active non-violence. When the 1986 People Power Revolution erupted against the Marcos dictatorship, the world witnessed a literal fulfillment of the seventh beatitude on a national scale. Millions of unarmed citizens faced down tanks and soldiers with nothing but prayers, flowers, and a refusal to move. This event demonstrated that a population trained in the radical interpretation of peace could dismantle a heavily armed regime without firing a single shot. The Goss-Mayrs' role in this revolution serves as a historical proof of concept for the idea that the peacemaker is the ultimate architect of political change.

8.5 The Universality of the Peacemaker's Vocation

The global manifestations of the seventh beatitude through the work of the Goss-Mayrs highlight the versatility of the radical interpretation. They showed that whether in a Catholic parish in Brazil or a protest line in Manila, the core principles remain the same: the rejection of fear, the pursuit of truth, and the willingness to suffer for the sake of reconciliation. By globalizing the beatitude, they removed it from the realm of Western academic theology and returned it to the streets, where it originally began. Their legacy is a reminder that the work of the *eirenopoios* is a constant, borderless labor that seeks to replace the cycle of revenge with the creativity of love. This global perspective is essential for understanding how the radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9 moved from an individual ethic to a collective, worldwide movement for human dignity.

9. Gendered Peacemaking: Gbowee, Maguire, and the Power of Proximity

The radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9 has often been viewed through the lens of male-led theological or political movements. However, some of the most profound realizations of the peacemaker archetype have emerged from women who utilized their social and biological identities to disrupt cycles of violence. Figures like Leymah Gbowee in Liberia and Mairead Maguire in Northern Ireland moved the beatitude from the pulpit to the epicenter of civil war. They demonstrated that the work of an *eirenopoios* often involves the leverage of proximity—the refusal to remain distant from the suffering of the other side. By centering their activism on the preservation of life and the shared grief of mothers, they stripped the warring factions of their ideological justifications, revealing the naked cruelty of conflict.

9.1 The Maternal Archetype as a Subversive Tool

In many traditional societies, the roles of mother and sister carry a moral authority that transcends political affiliation. Radical women practitioners have historically weaponized this authority to create a space for peace where traditional diplomacy failed. They argued that the call to be a child of God is intrinsically linked to the protection of the next generation. By invoking the maternal archetype, these peacemakers were not reinforcing gender stereotypes but were instead using the only available social capital to challenge the hyper-masculine logic of war. This gendered approach to the seventh beatitude suggests that peacemaking is fundamentally a labor of care—a proactive, often dangerous, commitment to the survival of the community over the victory of the state or the faction.

9.2 Leymah Gbowee and the Women of Liberia: The Strike of the Womb

The work of Leymah Gbowee during the Second Liberian Civil War serves as a quintessential example of radical, gendered peacemaking. Gbowee organized the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, a movement that united Christian and Muslim women in a shared struggle against the predatory regime of Charles Taylor and the various rebel groups. Their strategy was one of absolute non-violent confrontation. They wore white T-shirts to symbolize their purity of intent and staged mass sit-ins at the fish market. Most famously, Gbowee led a "sex strike," encouraging women to withhold intimacy from their husbands until the fighting stopped. This was a radical reclamation of the body as a site of peace-building, forcing the men of the nation to confront the domestic consequences of their public violence.

9.3 The Siege of the Peace Talks: Physicality and Peace

The climax of Gbowee's radicalism occurred during the peace talks in Ghana in 2003. When the negotiators—warlords and politicians—stalled the proceedings while the civilian population continued to die, the women surrounded the building. They physically blocked the exits, effectively taking the leadership of the country hostage until a peace agreement was signed. When security forces threatened to arrest them, Gbowee famously threatened to strip naked—a profound cultural taboo in Liberia that would have brought divine shame upon the men. This willingness to use one's own body as a barricade and a symbol of moral judgment is the hallmark of the radical peacemaker. Gbowee proved that the seventh beatitude is fulfilled when the vulnerable refuse to let the powerful continue their games of destruction.

9.4 Mairead Maguire and the Peace People: Breaking the Tribal Silence

In Northern Ireland, the "Troubles" were sustained by deep-seated sectarian divisions that appeared insurmountable. Mairead Maguire was thrust into the role of a peacemaker following the 1976 death of her sister's three children, who were struck by a car driven by an IRA member during a high-speed chase. Rather than succumbing to the expected cycle of revenge, Maguire

joined forces with Betty Williams to launch the Peace People. Their radicalism lay in their refusal to stay within their own Catholic tribe. They organized mass rallies that brought tens of thousands of Catholics and Protestants together to demand an end to the violence. By walking through "no-go" zones and challenging both the IRA and the British Army, Maguire embodied the eirenopoios as a cross-pollinator of reconciliation.

9.5 Proximity and the Humanization of the Enemy

A core component of Maguire's philosophy was the power of proximity. She argued that violence is only possible when the "other" is kept at a distance and reduced to a political label. The radical peacemaker, therefore, must initiate physical contact with the enemy. Maguire's work involved visiting the families of victims on both sides of the conflict, insisting that their grief was identical. This humanization of the adversary is perhaps the most difficult aspect of the seventh beatitude. It requires the practitioner to acknowledge the image of God in the person who has caused them the most pain. In the context of Northern Ireland, this was not just a spiritual exercise but a radical social act that threatened the very foundations of the sectarian war machine.

9.6 The Radical Peacemaker as a Protector of the Future

The shared legacy of Gbowee and Maguire is the redefinition of peace as a proactive protection of life. They moved away from the abstract "tranquility of order" discussed in Section 2 and toward a "peace of the streets." Their work emphasizes that the children of God are those who step between the bullet and the target. This gendered perspective highlights that peacemaking is often an unglamorous, repetitive labor of building relationships and refusing to be divided. By centering the radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9 on the preservation of the human family, they provided a template for how disenfranchised groups can use their collective identity to halt the machinery of war and force the powerful toward the negotiating table.

10. Eastern Synthesis: Thich Nhat Hanh and Engaged Buddhism

The radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9 reached a unique point of synthesis in the mid-twentieth century through the work of the Vietnamese Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Although he originated from a different theological tradition, his lifelong commitment to what he termed engaged Buddhism provided a profound cross-cultural validation of the seventh beatitude. By translating the internal discipline of mindfulness into a proactive strategy for social and political reconciliation, Thich Nhat Hanh bridged the gap between Eastern contemplative practice and Western radical activism. His friendship with figures like Thomas Merton and Martin Luther King Jr. demonstrated that the vocation of the peacemaker is a universal human calling that transcends the boundaries of dogma and geography.

10.1 The Transcultural Peacemaker: Bridging East and West

Thich Nhat Hanh's arrival on the world stage during the Vietnam War presented a challenge to the traditional Western understanding of the peacemaker as a diplomat or a soldier. He introduced the concept of the monk as an active participant in the struggle for human rights, arguing that the peace of the heart must be manifest in the peace of the streets. His interpretation of peacemaking was rooted in the Buddhist concept of compassion, yet it resonated deeply with the Christian vision of the children of God. For Thich Nhat Hanh, the *eirenopoios* was someone who had transcended the dualism of us versus them, recognizing that the violence occurring in the world was a reflection of the violence within the human spirit. This transcultural synthesis allowed him to speak to a global audience, calling for a radical disarmament that began with the individual but moved inexorably toward the structural.

10.2 The Principle of Interbeing: The Ontological Basis for Peace

At the core of Thich Nhat Hanh's radicalism was the philosophy of interbeing. This concept posits that no individual or nation exists in isolation; rather, all things are inextricably connected in a vast web of existence. This provided a new ontological foundation for the seventh beatitude. If we truly inter-are with our enemies, then any harm we inflict upon them is a harm we inflict upon ourselves. The peacemaker, therefore, is not someone who stands between two separate parties to negotiate a deal, but someone who awakens others to their inherent oneness. This radical empathy removes the psychological basis for war, as it becomes impossible to demonize or destroy an enemy once their suffering is recognized as one's own. In this framework, being a child of God means manifesting this universal connection through every word and action.

10.3 Engaged Buddhism: Peacemaking as Social Action

The term engaged Buddhism was coined by Thich Nhat Hanh to describe a form of spirituality that does not retreat from the world but enters into its darkest conflicts. During the Vietnam War, he founded the School of Youth for Social Service, which sent thousands of young people into the countryside to rebuild villages, establish clinics, and provide education, all while refusing to take sides in the conflict. This was a radical application of the peacemaker's vocation under fire. These practitioners were often targeted by both the communist North and the US-backed South because their neutrality was seen as a form of subversion. Thich Nhat Hanh argued that the true peacemaker must be prepared to be misunderstood and persecuted by all sides of a conflict, as their primary loyalty is to the preservation of life rather than the victory of a faction.

10.4 The Vietnam Context: Practical Peacemaking under Fire

The practical reality of being a peacemaker in a war zone required a level of courage that Thich Nhat Hanh compared to the sacrificial love of Christ. He and his followers practiced a form of non-violence that involved physically stepping into zones of combat to protect civilians and provide aid. This was not a passive observation of the war but a direct intervention into its mechanics. By refusing to carry weapons or identify with a political cause, they maintained a moral clarity that allowed them to serve as a bridge for reconciliation. This period of his life proved that the radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9 is most potent when it is tested by the reality of systemic slaughter. The peacemaker is not a figure of comfort but a figure of extreme vulnerability who uses that vulnerability to shame the forces of destruction.

10.5 The Synthesis of the Beatitudes and the Mindfulness Trainings

Thich Nhat Hanh's later work in exile focused on the development of the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings, which serve as a modern, globalized version of the Beatitudes. These trainings explicitly forbid the killing of any living being and mandate the active pursuit of social justice and reconciliation. He often taught that the Beatitudes were not just ancient sayings but living seeds that must be watered through daily practice. By synthesizing the ethical demands of the Sermon on the Mount with the psychological insights of Zen, he provided a practical methodology for the radical peacemaker. This methodology emphasized that peace is a way of walking, not a destination. To make peace, one must be peace, embodying the qualities of the children of God in the most mundane aspects of daily life.

10.6 The Nobel Connection: Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King Jr.

The historic significance of Thich Nhat Hanh's radical peacemaking was validated when Martin Luther King Jr. nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. King described him as an apostle of peace and non-violence, acknowledging that their shared commitment to the seventh beatitude was the most powerful force for change in the world. Their friendship was a visible sign of the "beloved community," a concept that mirrored the promise of the peacemakers being called children of God. This cross-pollination between the American Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnamese peace movement showed that the radical hermeneutic of Matthew 5:9 is a global phenomenon. It proved that whether through the lens of the Gospel or the Dharma, the call to be a peacemaker is a call to a revolutionary love that refuses to accept the inevitability of war.

11. Comparative Analysis: Political Realism vs. Radical Discipleship

The history of the seventh beatitude is essentially a history of the tension between two irreconcilable worldviews: political realism and radical discipleship. This division represents a fundamental disagreement on how human beings should respond to the presence of evil and the necessity of social order. While political realism argues that peace is a product of managed power and occasional, necessary violence, radical discipleship asserts that the methods of power are the very things that prevent true peace from ever taking root. This section provides a comparative analysis of these two frameworks, examining their underlying assumptions about human nature, the role of the state, and the definition of ethical success.

11.1 The Ethics of Responsibility versus the Ethics of Conviction

The intellectual divide between these two camps is best articulated through the categories established by Max Weber: the ethics of responsibility and the ethics of conviction. Political realism operates within the ethics of responsibility, where the moral quality of an action is judged by its outcomes. From this perspective, a leader is a peacemaker if they use force to prevent a larger catastrophe; the ends justify the means because the primary responsibility is the protection of the collective. In contrast, the radical practitioners explored in this paper operate within an ethics of conviction. For them, the moral quality of an action is inherent in the act itself. To be a peacemaker is to refuse violence regardless of the perceived outcome. The radical argues that once you accept the premise that killing can lead to peace, you have already abandoned the beatitude. This creates a scenario where the realist views the radical as irresponsible, while the radical views the realist as unfaithful to the divine mandate.

11.2 Power-Over versus Power-With: The Nature of Efficacy

A central point of comparison is the differing conceptualizations of power. Political realism relies on power-over—the ability to compel obedience through the threat or application of force. In this model, Matthew 5:9 is interpreted as the successful management of these coercive forces to achieve a stable equilibrium. Radical discipleship, however, utilizes power-with, or what Gandhi termed satyagraha. This is the power of moral suasion, collective non-cooperation, and the willingness to suffer. The radical practitioners believe that power-over is an illusion that only suppresses conflict without resolving its root causes. By using power-with, they aim for a transformation of the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. While the realist measures efficacy by the signing of treaties and the security of borders, the radical measures it by the internal conversion of the adversary and the restoration of human dignity.

11.3 The Problem of Evil and the Critique of Non-Resistance

The most frequent critique leveled against radical peacemakers is their supposed inability to deal with extreme evil. Critics of the radical hermeneutic often point to figures like Hitler or Pol

Pot to argue that non-violence is a form of moral cowardice that allows the innocent to be slaughtered. Political realism posits that the peacemaker must be willing to soil their hands to stop a monster. However, radical practitioners like Bonhoeffer and Jägerstätter offer a counter-critique. They argue that the very systems of militarism and national idolatry that realists defend are the breeding grounds for such monsters. For the radical, the problem of evil is not solved by adding more violence to the world, but by creating a society that refuses to produce the tools of destruction in the first place. They suggest that the realist's solution is actually a cycle of perpetual preparation for the next evil, whereas the radical's solution is the only one that offers a total exit from the logic of war.

11.4 Success as a Secular Metric versus Faithfulness as a Radical Metric

The definition of success remains the primary point of divergence. For the institutional figure, a peacemaking effort is successful if it results in a measurable reduction of hostilities or the preservation of the state. It is a secular, quantifiable metric. For the radical practitioner, the metric is faithfulness to the character of the Divine. Many of the figures discussed in this paper—such as Jägerstätter or the Berrigans—could be seen as failures by secular standards. Jägerstätter was executed, and the Berrigans spent much of their lives in prison while the wars they opposed continued. Yet, within the radical hermeneutic, these individuals were highly successful because they refused to allow the spirit of violence to claim their souls. They believe that the peacemaker is not called to be successful in the eyes of the world, but to be a witness to a truth that the world cannot yet see. This shift in the definition of success allows the radical to endure persecution and apparent defeat without abandoning their commitment to non-violence.

11.5 The Synthesis of the Prophetic and the Pragmatic

Despite these deep divisions, there is a point of synthesis where the prophetic witness of the radical informs the pragmatic decisions of the realist. Throughout the twentieth century, the radical practitioners served as the conscience of the state, forcing political leaders to justify their actions against a higher moral standard. Without the radical, political realism tends toward nihilism; without the realist, radicalism can sometimes drift into irrelevance. However, the transhistorical analysis of Matthew 5:9 suggests that the radical interpretation is the more "realistic" one in the long term. As the Goss-Mayrs and Thich Nhat Hanh demonstrated, non-violent movements have a higher rate of success in creating lasting social change than violent ones. This suggests that the seventh beatitude is not an impossible ideal for a future world, but a sophisticated and effective technology for transformation in the present one.

12. Conclusion: The Future of Radical Peacemaking in a Polarized Age

The transhistorical journey of the seventh beatitude reveals a consistent, high-stakes tension between the safety of institutional order and the risk of radical transformation. From its linguistic roots as a call to active craftsmanship to its modern manifestations in the streets of Monrovia and the prison cells of the United States, the vocation of the peacemaker has remained the most dangerous and demanding of the Christian ethical requirements. As we navigate the complexities of the mid-twenties, characterized by deep algorithmic polarization, the threat of cyber-warfare, and the existential crisis of climate change, the radical interpretation of Matthew 5:9 offers more than just a historical curiosity. It provides a robust, tested framework for human survival that prioritizes the restoration of relationships over the maintenance of hierarchies.

12.1 The Enduring Paradox of the Eirenopoios

The central paradox of the peacemaker is that their work often appears to be the primary cause of social friction. As this paper has demonstrated, the radical lineage—from Tolstoy to the Berrigans—has consistently faced persecution not because they were violent, but because their non-violence was so effective at exposing the hidden violence of the status quo. The eirenopoios is a craftsman who builds peace out of the raw materials of conflict, which necessitates entering the center of the storm. This conclusion reaffirms that the seventh beatitude is not a blessing for the passive or the timid, but for the spiritually and physically courageous who are willing to stand in the breach. The promise of being called children of God is thus a recognition of a shared divine nature that seeks life where the world seeks death.

12.2 Polarization and the Crisis of Proximity

In a contemporary era defined by digital echo chambers and the dehumanization of political adversaries, the radical emphasis on proximity has become more critical than ever. Figures like Mairead Maguire and Thich Nhat Hanh proved that peace is impossible at a distance. When individuals are reduced to data points or ideological labels, the psychological mechanisms of war are easily activated. The future of radical peacemaking requires a deliberate move toward physical presence and shared vulnerability. This involves a rejection of the safe, sanitized "peace" of the internet in favor of the difficult, face-to-face labor of reconciliation. The radical practitioner of the future must be someone who bridges the divide not through digital debate, but through the common labor of building shalom in local communities.

12.3 Eco-Peacemaking: Expanding the Circle of Shalom

The radical interpretation of the seventh beatitude is currently undergoing its latest evolution: the inclusion of the non-human world. As ecological degradation fuels new conflicts over water, land, and resources, the definition of the peacemaker must expand to include those who seek a

right relationship with the Earth itself. This eco-peacemaking draws on the communalist traditions of Day and Jordan, arguing that we cannot have peace among humans while we are at war with the biosphere. The shalom of the Kingdom of Heaven is a holistic flourishing that encompasses all of creation. In this context, the child of God is recognized by their commitment to sustainable living and their resistance to the industrial exploitation that provides the material impetus for global conflict.

12.4 The Radical Peacemaker as a Liminal Figure

Perhaps the most significant finding of this analysis is the role of the peacemaker as a liminal figure—someone who exists on the edges of competing power structures. Whether it was Bonhoeffer resisting the Reich, Dorothy Day living in poverty, or Leymah Gbowee blocking the doors of a luxury hotel, these individuals were effective precisely because they were not beholden to the systems they sought to change. This liminality allows the peacemaker to speak truth to power without fear of losing status. In a polarized age, the need for these unaligned, prophetic voices is paramount. They serve as a third way, offering a moral alternative to the binary choices of modern politics. They remind us that the ultimate loyalty of the child of God is to humanity, not to a flag, a party, or a platform.

12.5 Final Summary: The Call to Creative Disruption

Ultimately, the radical hermeneutics of Matthew 5:9 suggest that the only way to achieve a lasting peace is through the creative disruption of the cycle of revenge. The figures examined in this paper did not wait for the state to grant them permission to make peace; they took the initiative, often at the cost of their freedom and lives. Their legacy is a call to move beyond the institutional "tranquility of order" toward a proactive, sacrificial engagement with injustice. As the world continues to grapple with the same fundamental questions of power and violence that Jesus addressed on the Mount, the radical peacemaker remains the most potent symbol of hope. They prove that while the peacemakers may be frequently cursed in this world, they are the only ones capable of building a world that is truly blessed.

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